

Congressional Testimony

**Gen. John M. Keane
US Army, Retired**

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Mr. Chairman, ranking minority and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me, once again, to testify before your distinguished committee.

Let me say up front, that while there are many options for the way ahead in Afghanistan there is a single choice which offers the U.S. and the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed against the Taliban insurgency and thereby stabilize the country; that choice is Gen. McChrystal's and Gen. Petraeus' counter-insurgency strategy with the appropriate level of military forces, civilian personnel and financial resources.

To understand that statement we must know what has happened to Afghanistan since the invasion of 2001 and why this is the only remaining viable choice.

It is a fact, that Afghanistan beginning in 2002 and increasingly so in 2003, became a secondary priority to the war in Iraq. Indeed, it remained as such till this year, 2009, when only now, we are beginning to shift our priority effort from Iraq to Afghanistan. As such, as a secondary effort, despite the addition of NATO forces and resources, Afghanistan has always been operating at the margin and, in most of those years, below what was required in forces and resources. Not surprising the Taliban advantaged this vulnerability and not only re-emerged but have been able to gain the initiative to the point the momentum is on their side, particularly, in the south and east. Add to that, a weak, ineffectual central government plagued by corruption, election fraud and legitimacy issues, Afghanistan has now become a major challenge.

It is appropriate to ask, is Afghanistan worth the continued sacrifice of U.S. lives and treasures? What should be our strategic goal? Is an adjustment in goals and resources appropriate?

Let me briefly answer those questions by stating our strategic goal in Afghanistan should be a secure, stable country without an Al Qaeda sanctuary. And yes, it is worth the continued sacrifice to achieve that goal, not only because a stable Afghanistan is in our national interest but its stability is inextricably linked to the stability in Pakistan. The Al Qaeda center of gravity, is not Afghanistan, it is Pakistan. A loss of Afghanistan is a win for the Taliban and the Al Qaeda in Pakistan with potential serious consequences for Pakistan. While there are few Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, it is clear they supported one another going back to pre 9/11 when the Taliban would not give up the Al Qaeda when U.S. / Allied attack was imminent. Moreover, the Taliban is very current on IED technology and U.S. tactics as they evolved first in Iraq. It is not about how many Al Qaeda fighters are in Afghanistan but how the Al Qaeda network enables, trains and supports the Taliban. We cannot conveniently separate the two, if we lose in Afghanistan, the Al Qaeda will be right behind the Taliban as they take over.

Make no mistake, Pakistan is a far more consequential country, strategically, mostly because of nuclear weapons but also because of the size and influence of the country. Therefore, it is appropriate to link the stability of both of these countries together as U.S. strategic goals and national interests. One of our major challenges with the political and military leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan is their skepticism surrounding the U.S. commitment to their countries' stability and our resolve to stay the course. Given our track record in both countries, these doubts are well founded which clearly affect their attitudes and behavior. Many leaders in Afghanistan are unwilling to commit to the government of Afghanistan because they are uncertain about the U.S. commitment. As we deliberate on the way ahead this issue must be kept in mind. It is difficult to forecast a stable southern Asia without the U.S. directly assisting in defeating the radical Islamists, who are threatening that stability. Our resolve should not be limited to staying, but it should be -- defeating the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

How can we do that? We must adopt a civil-military strategy with counter insurgency strategy as the center piece. In insurgencies the center of gravity

is not the enemy, as it is in conventional wars, it is the people. These are fundamentally people wars and, as such, securing, protecting and freeing the people from intimidation, coercion and terror becomes job ONE.

Our operations take on a different character and, in many cases, are largely non-kinetic because our focus is to free the people from insurgent malice and influence. Of course, we still must kill and capture insurgents and hold their horrific behavior liable, and we do. It is critical that tribal insurgent leaders feel the burden of the loss of their tribal members, sense our commitment to see it through to the end. War is always about breaking the will of your opponent.

The ultimate solution in Afghanistan, as it is in Iraq, is for Afghanistan security forces to provide a secure and stable environment. The problem we have in front of us, similar to 2006 in Iraq, is that the security situation has deteriorated well beyond the ANSF's capability to cope with it even with U.S. and NATO force assistance. The ANSF is currently projected to grow to about 234,000 by 2010 and needs to grow to 400,000, and that will take until 2013 or 2012 at best. Given the new COIN strategy and current force levels what can we do to turn around the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan in the meantime? How do we mitigate the 2 to 3 years as we wait for the appropriate growth of the ANSF? The only remaining answer to "stop the bleeding" and turn around the situation is the introduction of U.S. troops. It is not necessary to apply the COIN strategy to Afghanistan, at large, the priority and focus is south and east and we can achieve the appropriate COIN force levels combining NATO and Afghan forces. I will leave to Gen. McChrystal as to what the appropriate number is because only he and his staff have the fidelity to make that kind of analysis.

What I am saying is we need multiple brigades of combat troops, support troops and trainers for the ANSF. It seems appropriate that while the NATO countries are unwilling to provide additional combat forces, they should be pressured to provide additional trainers and financial resources. As the ANSF conducts side by side operations with U.S. / NATO forces as a matter of routine, similar to what we did in Iraq, their proficiency increases exponentially.

One of the major lessons learned from Iraq, after 3 years with the wrong strategy, and the favorable turnaround in 2007 and 2008, is that security is a necessary pre-condition for political progress and economic development. This applies directly to Afghanistan. The military as part of the COIN strategy was key to executing government reform, attacking corruption and malign behavior in Iraq and it can have the same impact in Afghanistan. We cannot just execute the status quo on security or do more than the status quo but less than what is required and expect to make political, governance and reconstruction progress without the appropriate level of security. It will not happen; we will fail. What about other options? Why not a counter-terrorism strategy given the Al Qaeda are in Pakistan and not Afghanistan? Why not make a diplomatic effort to seek political accommodation with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A counter-terrorism strategy is essentially killing and capturing insurgent and terrorist leaders. To do so, we rely primarily on a technology solution, drones, missiles, and precision bombs. This strategy is helpful in Pakistan / Afghanistan as it was in Iraq, but it is not decisive. (In Iraq we relied primarily on SOF versus technology). Nor has it been decisive for the Israeli's in the many years of their struggle. The reality is leaders are replaced, a set back to be sure for a particularly influential leader, but a movement based on ideas and determination is not defeated by killing leaders. It is only defeated by isolating the movement from its source of strength, the dependency on the people. Give the people a better alternative and the insurgency is isolated. When the insurgents are isolated they are very vulnerable to being killed and captured. Moreover, despite a very aggressive and successful counter-terrorism operation in Iraq from 2003 to 2007, we were failing and we nearly lost the country. Similarly, we have been using a CT strategy in Afghanistan for many years and the situation has simply gotten worse. Are CT operations, valuable, yes, definitely, but they must compliment a fully integrated civil-military counter-insurgency strategy.

Why not make a political accommodation with the Taliban in exchange for stopping the violence and possibly ensuring that no Al Qaeda sanctuary returns to Afghanistan. This is the height of folly and naiveté. The Taliban are winning from their perspective, believe that the U.S. will be leaving, and they will be back in control of Afghanistan. Why should they settle for less, now, when they can get it all, later? In their minds, time is on their side.

These leaders have been approached before and there's no deal to be had and, "for the life of me", what part of Afghanistan do we surrender to the Taliban, forcing the Afghan people, who we have supported for eight years, to live under the Taliban sadistic rule. Let me be clear, we can reach out to the lower level Taliban leaders who are reconcilable, particularly, those who are motivated by being on the winning side. This can occur quite substantially when we turn around the deteriorating situation and begin to gain momentum. Certainly, Gen. McChrystal understands this and has Gen. Graeme Lamb assigned as his deputy to pursue and create these opportunities, who did the very same in Iraq for Gen. Petraeus.

In conclusion, what is the way ahead:

- Not since 2001 when the decision to attack Afghanistan was made have we had a more critical opportunity to make a decisive decision to stabilize Afghanistan. We can succeed. We can turn this around in 2 to 3 years. CAUTION: If there is a sense of a lack of commitment, NATO and Pakistan will hedge and pull back, many tribal leaders and others in Afghanistan will do the same, and it will undermine the very objectives we are trying to achieve.

- Put in play a COIN strategy with the appropriate military, civilian and financial resources. CAUTION: Do not be tempted to do the COIN strategy with less than the required troops because you will be doing more in other areas such as: an enhanced CT operation, aggressive governance to stomp out corruption, surging against poppy production and narco-trafficking, enabling reconciliation and other worthy focus areas. Trying to do more with less, will fail, and, fail miserably.

- Get tough with Hamid Karzai about his known corruption, election fraud and ineffectual government. Be specific and hold his behavior accountable. We should not be bashful, our national interests are at stake and our sacrifice and promised future commitment is real and gives us the premise for tough mindedness.

- Major nation building should not be our objective but it is appropriate to establish the rule of law with a workable judiciary, improve the central government's effectiveness, strengthen

governance at the local level, particularly at the district and provincial level, and assist with economic development.

-- Re-engage countries in the region in the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular, and, in general, the radical Islamist threat to that stability. Their assistance is vital.

-- Make a strong commitment to the future stability of Afghanistan which is enduring but is not open ended in terms of our military forces. Our forces will begin to leave as the ANSF's grow in size and capability (similar to what we have done in Iraq).

-- We are blessed with some of the very best general officers we have had in our history to execute our strategy, in McChrystal, Lamb, Rodriguez and Petraeus along with Ambassador Eikenberry. We should rely heavily on their judgment and experience.

--There are no guarantees of success but our troops who are sacrificing, the most, deserve the best winning hand possible. Their competence, extraordinary sacrifice, unprecedented resilience, their dogged determination to succeed may in fact be the finest chapter in U.S. military history. Never before have we asked so much, of so few, for so long.

Thank you and I look forward to your question.